TRENDS

Have Passport, Will Travel?

Microsoft's decision to open its .Net Passport services *(www.passport.com)* to rivals using the **MIT**-developed Kerberos authentication protocol has left many wondering what the software giant has up its sleeve.

By keeping user information in a centralized database, Passport allows users to log in once and access various Web services, including those from Microsoft and its partners. The upside? There's no need to reenter your mailing address and credit-card information when you want to make a purchase. On the other hand, Microsoft gains a database filled with personal information from millions of users.

Shortly after the outcry raised by privacy groups over a Microsoft-controlled repository of consumer information, the company decided to implement Kerberos standards in Passport's technology. To prevent a malicious hacker from stealing information passing across the Internet, Kerberos forces a user's computer to "prove" its identity to a Web server, and vice versa. Once the machines' respective identities are confirmed—a process known as "authentication"—they encrypt and send their transmissions.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BEK SHAKIROV

Kerberos is an open protocol, freely available from MIT for anyone to use or modify *(web.mit.edu/kerberos/www)*. Since Microsoft is infamous for using proprietary systems, many are suspicious of the company's intent. At press time, Microsoft was planning meetings to discuss the viability of building a large Web authentication network, a process many have likened to the arduous standards process banks went through to develop the ATM network.

Whether companies will climb on board remains to be seen. With rivals **AOL Time Warner** *(www.aol.com)* and **Sun Microsystems** *(www.sun.com)* developing their own authentication networks, Microsoft faces stiff resistance.

"Getting the different organizations to agree on common policies and having technologies that are flexible enough to implement them—without destroying interoperability—is the real issue," says Frank Prince, a senior analyst at Forrester Research. "The same sets of problems exist for a Microsoft-specific solution or any other standardization effort." *—Atticus Fisher*

Work Different: Office for OS X

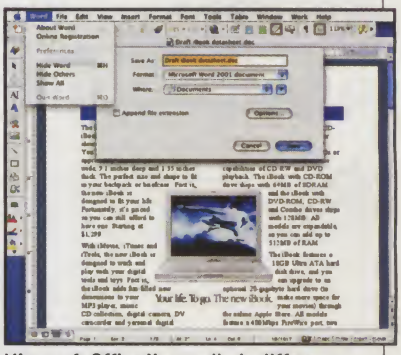
A version of Microsoft Office for Mac OS X has hit the shelves. If you're "biplatform" and use Office X for Mac, and Office XP, you'll notice differences between them.

Features unique to the Mac version integrate OS X-specific technologies, including full support for the Mac's Aqua interface and "sheet"-style dialogs and alert boxes. Office X also supports Quartz, an OS X drawing technology that enables sophisticated graphics effects, including transparency and layering.

One application is entirely different: Entourage, which first appeared in Office 2001 for Mac as a replacement for Outlook Express, continues to be Mac-only. Entourage X for Mac offers a redesigned user interface and improved editing tools. In addition to e-mail, Entourage includes address-book, note-management, calendar, and scheduling features.

Why the differences? "The Mac business unit and the Windows team have been going down two separate forks in the road," says Erik Ryan, product manager of **Microsoft's** Macintosh business unit. "It would be a grave mistake to stuff all the features from XP into the Mac." Microsoft learned this lesson in 1994, after releasing Word 6.0 for Macintosh. "We had egg on our face—we don't ever want to do that again," he says.

Office for OS X is also notable for what it lacks: certain controversial features present in Windows XP. Office X supports neither Smart Tags nor the online product-activation requirement of its Office XP counterpart.



Microsoft Office X actually *is* different.

Rob Enderle, research fellow specializing in desktop technology at Giga Information Group, notes that Mac and Windows users are distinct groups. "Although the two environments are very similar in terms of technology, the way they present information is quite different," he says, adding that Microsoft finds it beneficial to create unique applications for the Mac. "Otherwise, you would find Mac users wouldn't be very supportive of Microsoft's offering." *—Kevin Savetz*

When the E-Book Is Too Long

CliffsNotes, those handy little yellow-and-black guides to literature, just got even smaller. More than 100 titles are now available as e-books on the Palm Reader platform, available for the Palm or Pocket PC OS at ***www.palm.com/ebooks.*** Most cost $5.99.

For those who prefer electronic cramming, you can find CliffsNotes for *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Odyssey*, *Moby-Dick*, *Beloved*, the *Oedipus* trilogy, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Prince*, *The Ambassadors*, and many more.